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ABSTRACT

Women's workforce attachment is becoming increasingly similar to men's, with rising labor force participation rates and overall occupational diversification. However, many factors impede women's ability to achieve the same employment-based economic security that men experience. Although gender-neutral on their face, public policies reinforce obstacles to women's success in achieving economic self-sufficiency in these two areas: the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system and job training for low-income women. The eligibility criteria incorporated into states' UI programs create " barriers for employed caregivers and workers with low earnings, and job training programs may reflect and reinforce the occupational sex-stereotyping that impedes women's access to higher-wage jobs. Until women's experiences are legitimated and defined as one norm for "ideal workers," programs such as these will not offer the workforce security that women need and have earned through their waged work. (Contains 34 references and 14 charts.) (Author/YLB)

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# Promoting Women's Workforce Security: Findings from IWPR Research on Unemployment Insurance and Job Training

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## Abstract

Women's workforce attachment is becoming increasingly similar to men's, with rising labor force participation rates and overall occupational diversification. However, many factors impede women's ability to achieve the same employment-based economic security that men experience. This paper examines two areas in which public policies, although gender-neutral on their face, reinforce obstacles to women's success in achieving economic self-sufficiency: the Unemployment Insurance system and job training for low-income women. The eligibility criteria incorporated into states' unemployment insurance programs create barriers for employed caregivers and workers with low earnings, and job training programs may reflect and reinforce the occupational sex-stereotyping that impedes women's access to higher-wage jobs. Until women's experiences are legitimated and defined as one norm for "ideal workers," programs such as these will not offer the workforce security that women need and have earned through their waged work.

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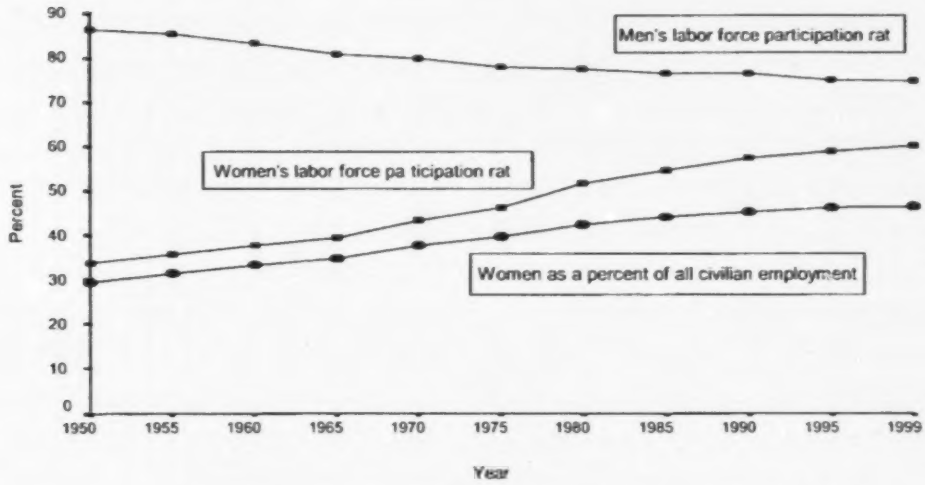
## I. Women and workforce security

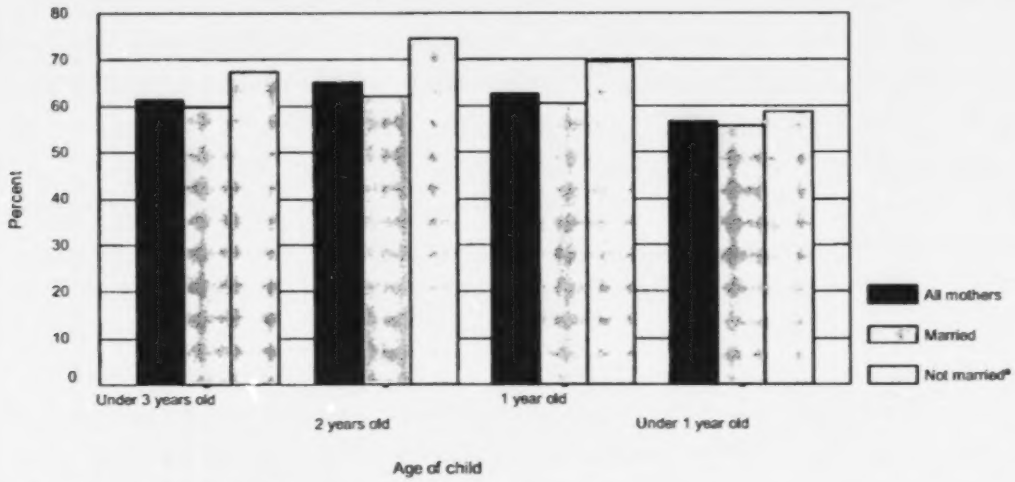
It has become commonplace to acknowledge women's increased activity in the labor market as one of the most important social changes of the 20th century. The growth of women's share of the labor force, and particularly of mothers' labor force participation, has fundamentally changed the way families function, the relationship of families to the workplace and to schools, and women's economic opportunities. In a period of just 50 years, the rate at which women enter the labor market increased by 77 percent (while men's labor force participation rate dropped by 14 percent), and the share of the labor force that is female rose from well under one-third to nearly one-half (Chart 1). Women with young children have higher labor force participation than women overall (Chart 2).

**Chart 1.**
**Women's and men's labor force participation rates and women as a percent of all civilian employment, 1955-1999**




Source: *Economic Report of the President* (2000), Tables B-34 and B-37.

**Chart 2. Labor force participation of mothers with children under 3 years old, 1999**

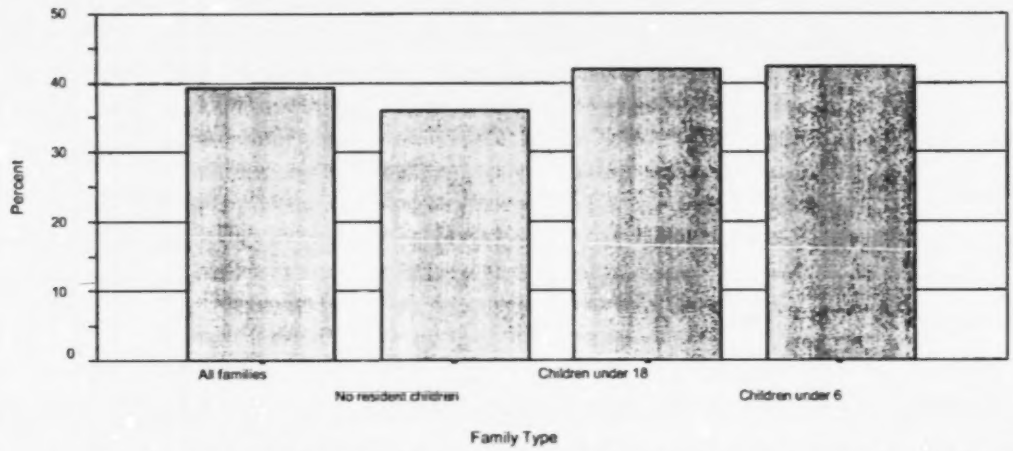



[a] Includes never-married, divorced, separated and widowed women.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2000a), Table 6.

With this increased labor market activity has come a substantial responsibility for contributing to families' income (Chart 3). Women's earnings constitute 40 percent of total family income, and, in families with resident children, women provide even a slightly higher portion of family income. Thus, in no respect can women's earnings be considered to be ancillary to families' economic well-being, a supplement that provides nice extras but can easily be foregone.

**Chart 3. Percent of fami y income provided by women's earnings, by family type, 200**




Source: Authors' analysis of the March 2000 Annual Demographic Supplement to the Current Population Survey.



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Despite public recognition of the changing demographic patterns of work attachment, public policy has been slow to understand and respond to the implications for women's economic security. The fact that women continue to be society's primary caregivers has not led to the significant implementation of programs that make it easier to be both a committed employee and the family's main provider of care for children, ill or disabled family members or elderly relatives. Without these programs, women's employment is more likely than men's to be constrained or interrupted by caregiving demands. Government policies have failed to evolve to meet women's needs in the contemporary workforce. And, even several decades after the landmark legislation and executive action of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Higher Education Act of 1965, and Executive Order 11246 of 1965 made sex-based (and other) employment discrimination illegal and opened many educational and employment opportunities to women, sex-stereotyping blocks women's full occupational and economic integration into the labor market.

This paper discusses findings of two research projects conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) that examine how gender bias is institutionalized and how it affects women's workforce security. One project investigates women's experiences of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system, both historically and as it currently functions. The other uses a case-study approach to shed light on the potential of job training programs to increase low-income women's earnings. Like many other aspects of the labor market, both programs, while gender-neutral on their face, have disparate gender impacts that decrease women's economic security.

## II. Women's access to unemployment insurance

The Unemployment Insurance system is a federal-state program enacted in 1935 as part of the Social Security Act (SSA). The federal statute sets broad parameters for state UI programs, but states define most of the details of program design, including eligibility criteria and benefit levels. UI was created in response to a series of economic downturns around the turn of the 20th century, including the massive employment dislocation of the Great Depression. Along with other new social insurance programs such as workers' compensation, the establishment of UI reflected the recognition that, as the U.S. became an industrialized society based on waged labor, families had become increasingly vulnerable to poverty should their main (usually, though by no means always, male) wage-earner become unable to work (Heymann 2000).[1]

However, there has always been some disagreement about which workers should be served by UI, and the program has always excluded significant numbers of the unemployed. One of the program's chief architects observed that "there never has been agreement as to the purpose of unemployment compensation [UI] or its basic principles" (Witte 1945, 21). In part, this controversy was fueled by policymakers' failure to enact the full range of social programs that was originally envisioned for the SSA. The task force charged by President Roosevelt with outlining his new policy proposals saw its mission as

[1] UI has other goals as well, including the provision of a countercyclical infusion of consumer spending during economic recessions, strengthened attachment between employers and their skilled workers during temporary layoffs, and the maintenance of labor standards during economic crises (Blaustein, O'Leary and Wandner 1997).



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> the protection of the individual against dependency and distress. This includes all forms of social insurance (accident insurance, health insurance, invalidity insurance, unemployment insurance, retirement annuities, survivors' insurance, family endowment, and maternity benefits (Witte 1962, 21).

Had this comprehensive set of programs been created, including some that specifically give support to family caregivers, some of the conflict between women's employment-related needs and existing public policies might have been avoided. Indeed, the decision to establish a social insurance model of unemployment compensation, instead of a social assistance approach, set up the contemporary conflict between UI and women workers. Social insurance programs provide benefits on the basis of an employment relationship, by insuring employees against the risk of losing their source of earnings (because of unemployment, sickness or old age). They typically are offered only to workers with well-established employment experience, and usually rely on payroll taxes (on employers, employees or both) for funding. At the time the SSA was created, some European countries were inaugurating income support programs through social assistance programs financed through general revenues and offering benefits on the basis of need. These programs were more supportive of workers who did not follow the male breadwinner/female homemaker family configuration (Kessler-Harris 1999).

UI had always been conceived as a program to help individuals who had demonstrated their attachment to the workforce and were temporarily and involuntarily out of a job. Other unemployed workers – those entering the workforce after completing schooling, after a spell of tending to domestic responsibilities, or because of loss of income due to a spouse's unemployment or desertion, for instance – were never considered to be deserving of UI benefits.[2] Over its 65-year history, the UI system has also selectively excluded other groups of workers. The original SSA denied the protection of UI to workers in many jobs held predominantly by African Americans, other workers of color, and women by exempting agricultural workers and those in private domestic service from coverage. Some policymakers claimed that the administrative difficulties of documenting employment and collecting UI taxes for workers in these occupations could not be surmounted (Willcox 1955) and thus the occupational restrictions were included "as a matter of course" (Witte 1963, 132). However, unemployment compensation systems in other countries provided feasible models that U.S. policymakers would have been aware of (Kessler-Harris 1999, Norton and Linder 1995-6). Agricultural and domestic service workers were denied access to the UI system because southern Democrats demanded that the new program not interfere with their exploitation of African-American workers in their sharecropping economy and in their system of domestic labor.

These occupational exclusions made 38 percent of unemployed African American men and 74 percent of unemployed African American women ineligible for UI benefits (Charts 4a-4c). Women and men of other racial/ethnic identities whose employment was concentrated in agriculture and domestic service were also disproportionately affected by these coverage restrictions.

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[2] These individuals might have found support in the general anti-poverty programs that were envisioned for the SSA but ultimately omitted.

**Chart 4a. Percent of workforce employed in agriculture, by sex and race, 193**

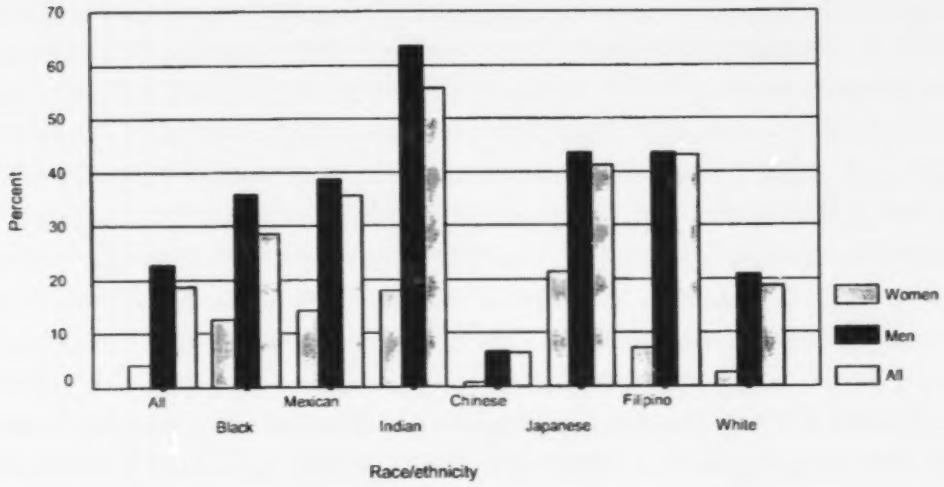


**Chart 4b. Percent of workforce employed in private domestic service, by sex and race, 193**

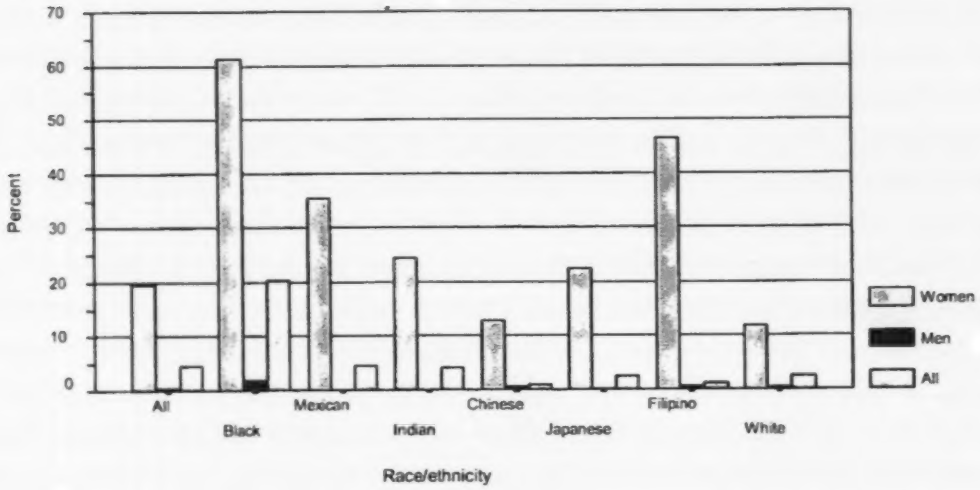


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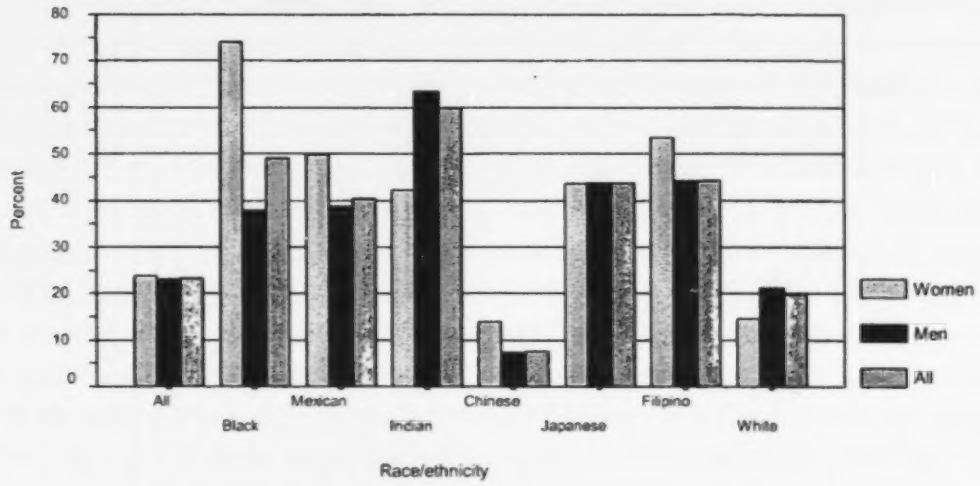
**Chart 4c. Percent of workforce employed in private domestic service, by sex and race, 1930**




Notes: "Agriculture" includes owners and tenants but excludes unpaid family workers. "Private domestic service" includes housekeepers and stewards, cooks, servants, and laundry workers not employed by restaurants, hotels, or laundries and excludes work performed in an individual's own household. Data are for "gainfully occupied" workers aged 10 and older; these individuals may not have been employed at the time the census survey was conducted.
Source: Authors' analysis of the *Fifteenth Census of the United States* (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1933).

Other facets of the new UI program disproportionately denied UI support to women and low-wage workers. To distinguish between involuntarily unemployed individuals, who deserved UI benefits, and the new labor force entrants and workers avoiding employment who did not, each state established a set of eligibility criteria to measure workforce attachment. Although a requirement of a certain number of hours of work over a specified period of time would be a straightforward criterion to judge workforce attachment, states opted to set a minimum earnings level instead. With workers of color and white women concentrated in low-wage jobs, earnings eligibility criteria excluded many of these workers from benefit receipt.

In its original form, the UI system did not erect explicit barriers to UI receipt on the basis of family care-giving responsibilities. The states were left with a great deal of discretion to define a worker's cause of unemployment as either qualifying or not, and to stipulate the penalties for failure to meet certain eligibility criteria. The model UI legislation provided by the Social Security Board (SSB) to guide state implementation was not exclusionary in this regard (Wandner and Stengle 1997), and original state laws were relatively open and flexible in considering a worker's circumstances to merit benefits. Over the years, however, coverage of workers who do not fit the employment norm defined by full-time working men became less generous.

Though primarily envisioned as a program for workers laid off during economic downturns, nothing in the federal guidelines prohibited states from offering benefits to workers whose employment was interrupted by the demands of their domestic responsibilities -- e.g., a worker with a sick child needing care, or a spouse who has been relocated. These are compelling



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circumstances that may leave a worker with no viable option other than temporary unemployment. Although they are referred to as "voluntary quits," they could certainly be encompassed by a UI system that seeks to provide temporary income support to workers who want to work but are unemployed through no fault of their own.

One UI policymaker wrote in 1945 that "probably everyone would agree that it is reasonable for a worker to quit . . . when he is needed at home to care for a sick member of his family, and that it is reasonable for a woman to marry even though her employer has a rule against retaining married women" (Kempfer 1945, 150), but policymakers increasingly took the opposite view. All but two states' original UI statutes simply required that workers have "good cause" to be unemployed in order to receive benefits (Bigge 1944). By 1943, 19 states limited qualifying unemployment to that caused by circumstances related or attributable to the employer or the employment relationship (Kempfer 1945), and in 2000, 37 states had such restrictions. Recently, state UI administrators reported that workers with difficulty using public transportation to get to work are more likely to qualify for UI benefits than those with child-care conflicts (US DOL/ETA 2001).

Penalties for violating these tighter eligibility requirements also became harsher over time. Under states' original UI laws, quitting a job "voluntarily" typically led to a period of disqualification during which benefits were withheld, but after which, if the worker were still unemployed, benefits would be paid. The rationale for delaying rather than denying benefits is that a person seeking work but remaining unemployed is, after some period of time, suffering from a lack of available jobs rather than from their quit decision. Between 1938 and 1943, however, 15 states modified their UI programs to further reduce or deny benefits for workers with voluntary quits (Friedman and Wendell 1944), despite exhortations from the federal agency overseeing social security programs and from the U.S. Department of Labor that the period of disqualification should be of limited duration (Wandner and Stengle 1997; see Table 1, below). The trend toward durational disqualification continued through the 1980s, and by 1990, 50 states had adopted this approach (Blaustein 1993). Thus, workers' access to benefits is blocked even after the conflicts that had led to their unemployment have been resolved and they are available for and seeking work.

In the ten years following the end of World War II, 20 states adopted new eligibility criteria requiring that an unemployed individual actively seek work while receiving benefits. The new work-search requirements appear to have been directed at women who had been recruited to work during the war and who were then disproportionately discharged during reconversion to a peace-time economy (Williams 1955). With their temporary welcome into traditionally male, relatively highly paid occupations abruptly withdrawn, denial of UI benefits forced many of these women to return to their pre-war positions in traditionally female, low-paid sectors (Burns 1945), or to drop out of the workforce all together. In the first two decades of the UI program, many states also adopted policies that prohibited unemployed women from receiving UI if they left work or were fired when they became pregnant or got married (Clague and Reticker 1944, Mettler 1998). These restrictions were made despite the SSB's frequent statements that UI should support workers who were balancing employment and caregiving (Bigge 1944) and arguments against the denial of UI benefits to women on the basis of pregnancy and marriage (SSB 1944).

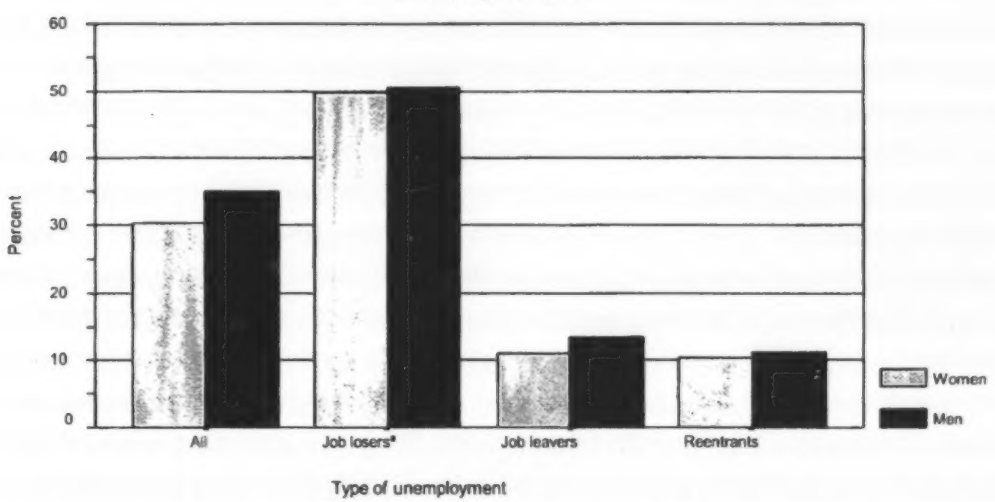
Table 1. Restrictions on UI eligibility enacted 1937 to 1955

| Provision | Number of states having the restriction in: | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1937-1941 | 1944-1945 | 1955 |
| Voluntary quit: | | | |
| Must be related to employment | 2 | 19 | |
| Violation causes disqualification | 5 | 20 | |
| Active work search requirement | | 6 | 26 |
| Marriage disqualification | | 16 | |
| Pregnancy disqualification | 5 | 18 | |

Source: Voluntary quits: related to employment, Bigge 1944, causes disqualification, Friedman and Wendell 1944; active work search, William 1955; marriage, Clague and Reticker 1944; pregnancy, Mettler 1998.

Given this historical precedence of refining UI eligibility to exclude certain groups of workers, it would not be surprising to find continued disparate treatment by sex of the unemployed through the UI system. Studies of current UI recipiency rates indicate that unemployed women are less likely than unemployed men to receive UI benefits (Chart 5). Among all groups of the unemployed with work experience (that is, excluding only unemployed new labor force entrants), the overall rate of UI receipt was 30.3 percent for women and 35.1 for men in 1993. Women job losers are only slightly less likely to receive UI benefits than men; differences by sex in UI recipiency for job leavers and labor force reentrants are larger.

**Chart 5. UI recipiency rates by sex and class of unemployment, 199**




[a] Job losers are those with work experience whose job ends "involuntarily," that is, because of an employer's action: typically, through a layoff. Job leavers terminate their employment "voluntarily" (though possibly due to irreconcilable conflict between employment and caregiving responsibilities). Reentrants have spent some time out of the labor force since their most recent employment.
Source: Wandner and Stettner (2000), Table 7.

To examine these differences in access to UI benefits in greater detail, IWPR analyzed data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a nationally representative longitudinal



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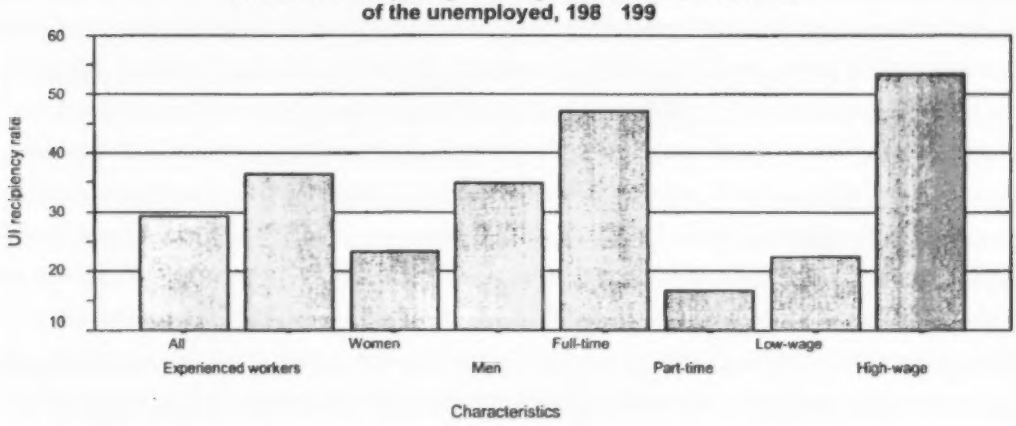
survey that collects demographic, income, and employment information.[3] Survey respondents are interviewed once every four months over a 30- to 36-month period and provide information relevant to every month within the previous four-month period. Thus, detailed employment and earnings histories can be constructed covering a long enough period of time to calculate monetary UI eligibility during a four-calendar-quarter base period. This analysis uses combined data from the 1988, 1990, 1991 and 1992 SIPP panels and examines spells of unemployment beginning 1989 through 1994.

UI recipiency rates were calculated for all workers with a spell of unemployment beginning in this period, and several demographic groups were examined individually (Chart 6). The analysis found substantial variation in recipiency rates among different groups of workers, including a much lower UI recipiency rates for women than for men: 23.3 percent of unemployed women received UI benefits, compared to 35.0 percent of unemployed men. The overall UI recipiency rate was 29.4 percent, with experienced workers (job losers and job leavers) being much more likely to receive UI (36.6 percent).

**Chart 6. UI recipiency rates by selected characteristics of the unemployed, 198 199**




1. Experienced workers were employed at some time during the base period (the first four of the five completed calendar quarters of work immediately preceding the beginning of the unemployment spell). Includes job losers and job leavers, but not reentrants and new entrants.
2. Full-time workers are those working 35 hours or more per week for the majority of months worked in the base period; part-time workers are those working less than 35 hours per week for the majority of months worked in the base period.
3. High-wage is $8.00 or more per hour (in 1996 dollars); this is approximately the wage required for someone working full-time throughout the year to support a family of four above the poverty line. Low-wage is less than $8.00 per hour.
Source: Emsellem, Allen and Shaw 1999, Appendix Tables 2 and 3.

This analysis demonstrates the importance of two factors in limiting women's access to UI benefits: work hours and wage level. Nearly half of unemployed full-time workers receive UI benefits (47.2 percent), compared to only 16.7 percent of part-time workers. Part-time workers

[3] This analysis was part of a project conducted with the National Employment Law Project that examined the Texas UI system. For more information about the complete project, see Emsellem, Allen and Shaw 1999.



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are excluded from UI recipiency in most states[4] by rules covering the nature of the search for a new job: that is, by stipulating that only those seeking full-time employment may receive UI benefits. Similarly, high-wage workers (those earning $8.00 or more per hour) have a recipiency rate of 53.5 percent, but only 22.5 percent of low-wage workers receive UI benefits.

Low-wage workers are screened out of UI recipiency by monetary eligibility criteria that set earnings thresholds and, in many states, by distributional requirements of earnings over the base period (e.g., a requirement that base period earnings be some multiple of the worker's highest quarterly earnings in the base period). These requirements are putatively a strategy for ensuring that UI benefits are paid only to workers with a significant attachment to the labor force, but their effect is to require greater work effort (in terms of hours worked) of lower-wage workers than of higher-wage workers. For instance, in a state with the average monetary eligibility threshold of $1,681, a worker earning $12.00 an hour would meet the earnings requirement after 140 hours of work, but a minimum-wage worker would have to work an additional 186 hours to satisfy the requirement. Both the earnings requirements and the full-time-work requirement affect women more than men, as women comprise a majority of the low-wage workforce and 63 percent of the part-time workforce (BLS 2001).

Another UI eligibility criterion that excludes many women is the requirement in most states that the cause of unemployment be related to the work itself or the employment relationship.[5] In these states, a worker who can no longer find suitable child care during an assigned shift, or whose caregiving responsibilities require their full- or part-time presence at home, may not be eligible for UI benefits, regardless of the worker's employment tenure or earnings history. Women are much more likely than men to leave a job for personal, family or health-related reasons (Table 2): in Texas, these reasons were given by 30.0 percent of women job leavers/losers and only 8.2 percent of men.

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[4] Because UI eligibility is defined at the state level and is determined by a combination of law, regulation and administrative practice, identifying which states allow payment of benefits to unemployed workers who are looking for part-time work is difficult. Estimates of the number of states that include part-time workers in their UI systems vary from 30 to 37 (National Employment Law Project 2001, GAO 2000). In the IWPR analysis, part-time status is determined by actual work hours during the base period, not by the unemployed worker's statement of the work hours they seek.

[5] Thirty-four states limit UI to workers whose employment terminated for reasons attributable to the employer or the employment relationship (USDOL/ETA 2001).


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Table 2. Reasons for separation from previous job, Texas, 1989-1994

| Reason for job separation | Women | Men |
|---|---|---|
| Layoff, plant closing | 16.7% | 34.6% |
| Discharged | 5.9 | 10.0 |
| Temporary job ended | 8.5 | 15.5 |
| Did not like working conditions | 11.1 | 6.9 |
| Dissatisfied with earnings | 2.3 | 4.0 |
| Did not like location | 2.6 | 2.6 |
| Going to school | 7.8 | 6.2 |
| Became pregnant/had child | 8.5 | 0.0 |
| Health reasons | 6.8 | 1.8 |
| Other family or personal reasons | 14.7 | 6.4 |
| Other | 16.4 | 12.1 |

Source: Emsellem, Allen and Shaw 1999, Appendix Table 6.

The UI system includes a number of programmatic features that disproportionately exclude women from benefit recipiency. This disparate exclusion arises largely from the norms reflected in the system regarding who is, and who is not, a deserving worker. Although states' original UI statutes were quite broad in coverage, over the years the program has increased eligibility criteria and added restrictions on benefit receipt. Workers with low earnings, with intermittent employment patterns, and with conflicts between employment and caregiving that cause disruptions in work have been deemed undeserving of the support of the UI program.

This situation illustrates the way women's economic opportunities are often constrained "because laws implicitly have been structured to fit male life patterns – male norms that are not stated as such, but are instead mistaken for the inevitable, natural state of being" (Maranville 1992, 1086). The "ideal" worker, according to the UI system, experiences unemployment only when laid off, not because of being faced with a choice between going to work or staying home to care for a sick child or one for whom appropriate care cannot be found. This "ideal" employee makes more than a low wage, and holds a full-time job. With their responsibility for family caregiving, women are less likely to meet these standards. Until the program is modified to reflect the needs and realities of the contemporary workforce, UI will not offer equal workforce security to women and men.

## III. Job training for low-income women

Skill development through job training or educational programs is essential if women are to achieve economic security through employment. Differences in earnings growth by level of education over the period 1979 to 1999 illustrate this clearly. Earnings of women with less than a high school education fell 11.0 percent during this period, and women with only a high school degree experienced an earnings increase of only 1.8 percent. Women with some college or a college degree increased their wages by 7.7 percent and 30.5 percent, respectively (BLS 2000b, Table 15). Along with educational credentials, job training has been shown to lead to higher wages for low-income women (Strawn 1998), and "intensive, comprehensive job-training is more effective than short-term, search-oriented training in raising women's wages" (Gault, Hartmann and Yi 1999, 211).



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The current welfare reform context that emphasizes rapid transitions from welfare to work and imposes lifetime limits on welfare receipt makes women's access to job training, and the specific nature of that training, more crucial for women's economic well-being. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) requires states to move at least 25 percent of their welfare caseloads into work, at 20 hours per week or more. These targets increase to 50 percent of caseload at 30 or more hours of work a week in 2002. Participation in some job training and educational programs can count toward the additional 10 hours of work per week, but states are limited in the portion of welfare caseloads that may be engaged in vocational training or education at one time (a maximum of 30 percent). In addition, job training may not last more than one year, even if the full job training program is of longer duration. Lifetime limits on welfare receipt remove an important safety net for women who cannot support themselves through employment or who might under Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the precursor welfare program, have cycled between employment and welfare according to the circumstances of their caregiving responsibilities and the practicality of maintaining their jobs.[6]

Given the recent restrictions in access to welfare support, the specific job training available to low-income women, and especially to women receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), has become even more important. One kind of skill development that holds promise for preparing women to achieve self-sufficiency through employment is training for nontraditional occupations. Nontraditional occupations for women are those in which women comprise less than 25 percent of incumbents (Women's Bureau 2001). They are an attractive option for women because their pay is often substantially higher than are earnings in traditionally female-dominated occupations – typically, 20 to 30 percent higher (Watkins 1996). For instance, child-care workers and hairdressers/cosmetologists, two female-dominated occupations, have median weekly earnings of $211 and $322, respectively, while auto mechanics and electrical/electronic technicians, two male-dominated occupations, average $555 and $690 per week, respectively (Table 3).

Jobs in nontraditional fields provide additional benefits that are important to women transitioning off welfare. They often have job ladders that provide upward (and earnings) mobility. Nontraditional jobs in the trades and crafts are typically unionized and offer benefits such as health insurance, pension plans, and paid sick and vacation leave (Hayot, Golin and Murthy, forthcoming). The leave programs in particular may help increase women's job tenure, as they provide some flexibility in accommodating caregiving responsibilities.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research undertook a research project to ascertain the extent to which job training for low-income women is providing, or has the potential to provide, a gateway to nontraditional occupations. The project involves an in-depth examination of job training and education programs in 7 cities across several geographic regions of the country.[7] Interviews have been conducted with welfare case managers and vocational counselors at

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[6] Under TANF, individuals may not receive welfare benefits for more than 5 years over their lifetime. States are allowed to impose shorter time limits, and many have.

[7] Study sites are located in the Northwestern, Pacific/West, Northeastern, Midwestern and Southern regions.

welfare offices, one-stop centers,[8] and employment service agencies. Administrators and instructors at job training centers and community colleges have also been interviewed, as have female and male job training students selected from the participating job training agencies and community colleges. This paper reports preliminary findings from this project, which are based on interviews with staff in 7 cities.[9]

Table 3. Earnings and women's representation in selected traditional and nontraditional occupations, 1999

| General Field | Occupation | Percent female | Median weekly earnings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nontraditional occupations for women | | | |
| Construction | Construction trades | 2.1% | $ 540 |
| | Welders | 6.1 | 520 |
| | Electricians | 2.3 | 645 |
| Professional | Engineers | 10.1 | 1,041 |
| | Architects | 16.3 | 918 |
| Public Service | Police officers | 13.8 | 751 |
| | Firefighters | 1.5 | 744 |
| Technical | Auto mechanics | 1.1 | 555 |
| | Electrical and electronic technicians | 15.5 | 690 |
| Transportation | Truck drivers | 3.4 | 527 |
| Traditional occupations for women | | | |
| Administrative support | Secretaries | 98.8% | $ 443 |
| | Bank tellers | 92.7 | 346 |
| Professional | Teachers, preK and kindergarten | 97.9 | 440 |
| Sales | Cashiers | 76.7 | 280 |
| Services | Child-care workers | 99.4 | 211 |
| | Hairdressers and cosmetologists | 84.8 | 322 |
| | Nursing aides | 88.5 | 322 |

Source: BLS 2000b, Table 3.

Welfare case managers' and vocational counselors' referrals to job training programs reflect the same occupational stereotyping by sex that is found generally in the labor market (Chart 7). All of the referrals made to clerical-medical and hospitality training programs were made for women, as were over 80 percent of all referrals for child-care and clerical-work training. About 65 percent of referrals to computer installation and computer repair programs were made for women, and fifty percent or less of referrals for job training in electronics/electrician were made for women. Only 20 percent of clients referred for truck-driver training were women.

[8] The Workforce Investment Act was enacted in 1998 in order " to provide workforce investment activities, through statewide and local workforce investment systems, that increase the employment, retention, and earnings of participants, and increase occupational skill attainment by participants, and, as a result, improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the Nation." One component of WIA activity is the establishment of one-stop delivery systems that assess individuals' skill levels, provide information about available supportive services, help with job search and placement, and provide intensive services, including job training, to certain qualified individuals.

[9] Additional information regarding the study design is provided in Negrey, Um'rani, Golin and Gault 2000.



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Actual enrollment in job training programs shows this same sex-typed bias (Chart 8). According to estimates provided by the job training administrators we spoke with, all of the job training participants in programs for bank tellers and nail technicians were women, as were approximately 90 percent of child-care providers and cosmetologists. Nearly all the participants in automotive technician programs were men, and men made up 80 percent of those engaged in appliance technician training.

**Chart 7.**
**Percentage of Female Referrals by Program**

When asked to discuss the process of selecting a training program for clients, case managers and vocational counselors indicated that they gave highest consideration to clients' expressed interest in various programs and occupations. For some, clients' preferences were the primary determinant of the job training plan. Over 70 percent of case managers and vocational counselors reported that clients' preferences were "very important" in designing employment plans (Chart 9). Case managers and counselors were also highly influenced by clients' statements of their personal employment goals. Over 50 percent indicated that these goals were "very important" in selecting job training programs, and an additional 18 percent said they were "somewhat important."



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Chart 8.
Male and Female Enrollment Patterns

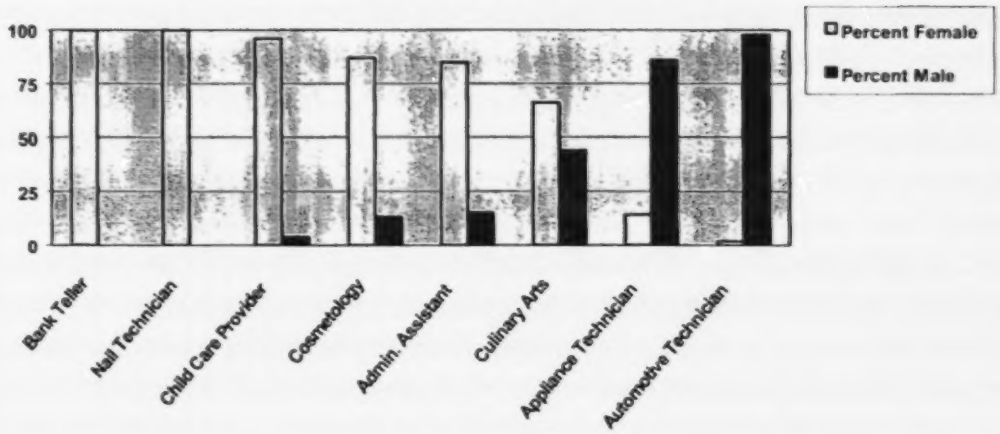
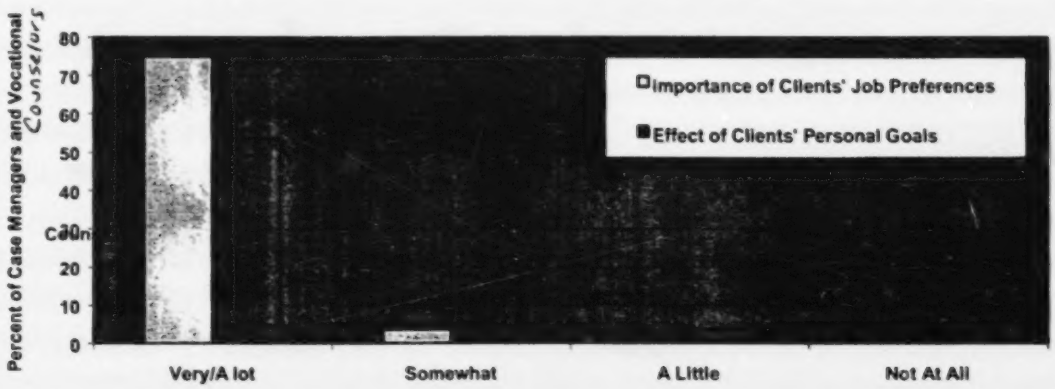



Chart 9.
Importance of Client Goals and Preferences in Employment Plans




Despite this reported concern for clients' occupational and personal goals, it appears that women's potential interest in nontraditional occupations did not affect case managers' and vocational counselors' referrals to job training programs. Over 70 percent of managers and counselors believed that most of their women clients were either "very" or "somewhat" aware of the option of training in nontraditional occupations, and nearly 60 percent of these managers and counselors reported that these women were interested in these job training programs (Chart 10). However, nearly 50 percent of the managers and counselors did not have any women clients currently enrolled in nontraditional job training programs (Chart 11).

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Chart 10.
Perceived Awareness of and Interest in Nontraditional Job Training

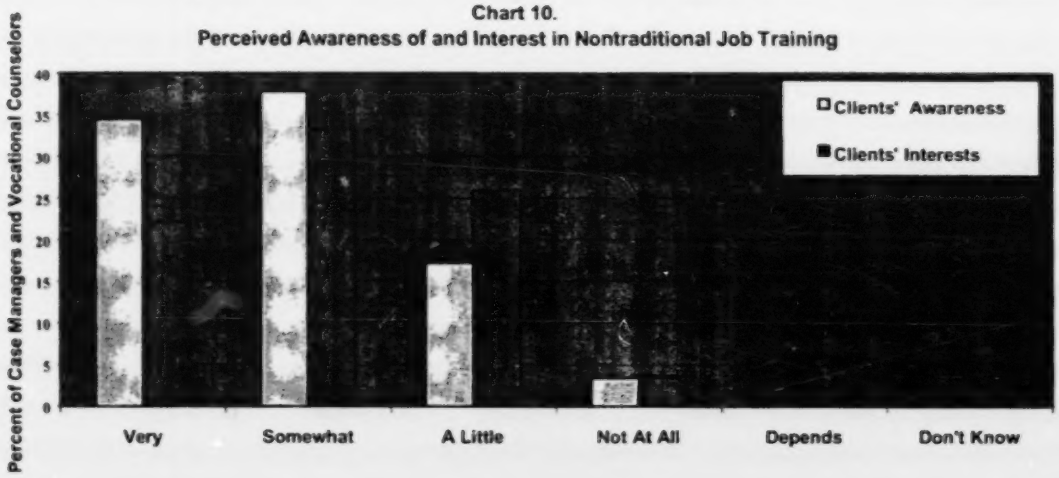
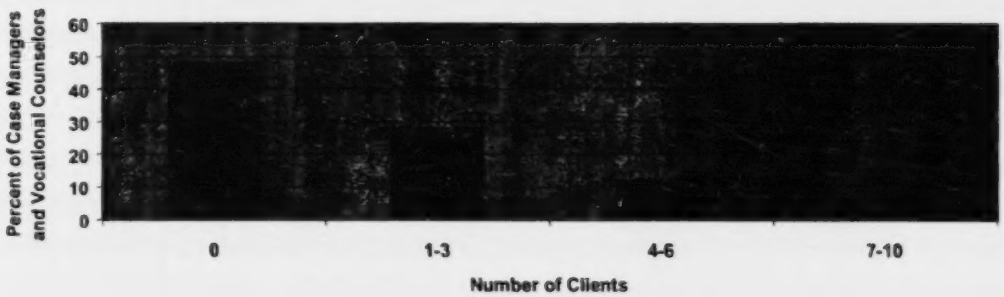



Chart 11.
Number of Female Clients Per Case Manager/Counselor Currently in Nontraditional Job Training




When asked whether nontraditional job training was an effective strategy to help low-income women find employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency, staff overwhelmingly said it was: 40 percent indicated it was "very" effective, and another 35 percent reported they perceived it to be "somewhat" effective (Chart 12). Some interviewees noted that these programs had good job placement records, and others pointed out that there was high demand in their locale for workers in these occupations.

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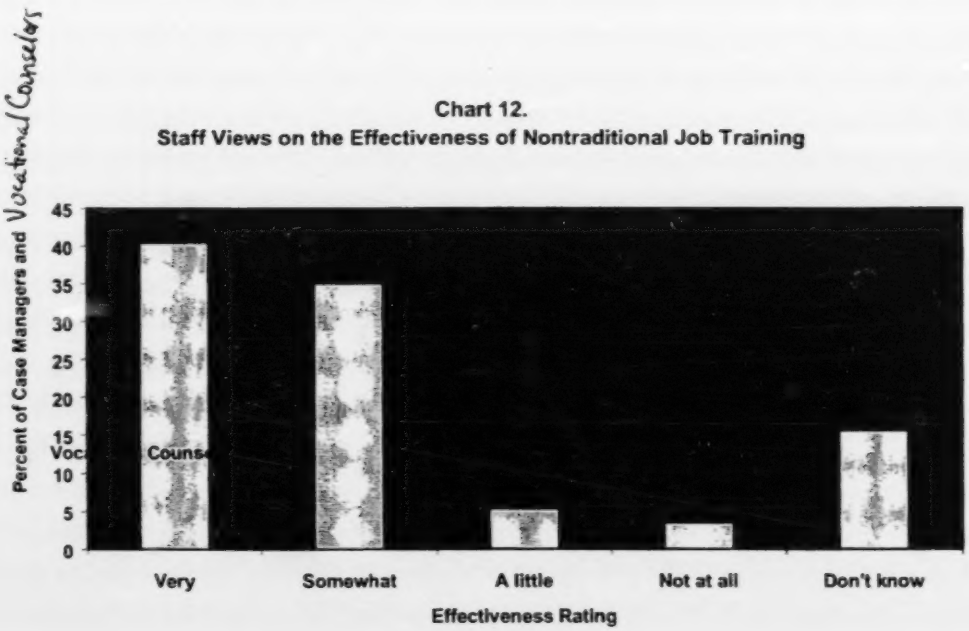
**Chart 12.**
**Staff Views on the Effectiveness of Nontraditional Job Training**




At the same time, less than 40 percent of the staff felt that TANF clients were "sometimes" likely to be successful in nontraditional job training, and only a third thought nontraditional programs were "always" or "often" a realistic option for these clients (Chart 13). Many interviewees reported that TANF participants often lacked the English and math skills required for successful participation in nontraditional training programs. Others pointed to institutional constraints, such as the length of some training programs, which exceeded the maximum allowable job training period under PRWORA, and the limited number of slots in training programs. The lack of social support for women challenging gender roles by enrolling in nontraditional job training and women's hesitancy about having only male coworkers were also cited as barriers for TANF clients.

Ironically, the main reason case managers and vocational counselors gave for women's perceived lack of interest in pursuing nontraditional job training was that they lacked the training required for these jobs (Chart 14). Presumably, successful participation in a nontraditional job training program would equip women with these requisite skills. In addition, three-fourths of the managers and counselors reported that their women clients did not like the work performed in nontraditional occupations. Nearly 40 percent indicated that their women clients did not want to work mostly with men, and over 40 percent commented that women believed they would not be good in nontraditional occupations even if they completed nontraditional job training programs. Managers and counselors also noted that apprehension about sexual harassment on the job and their families' and friends' anticipated disapproval of their training choice discouraged women from undertaking nontraditional job training.

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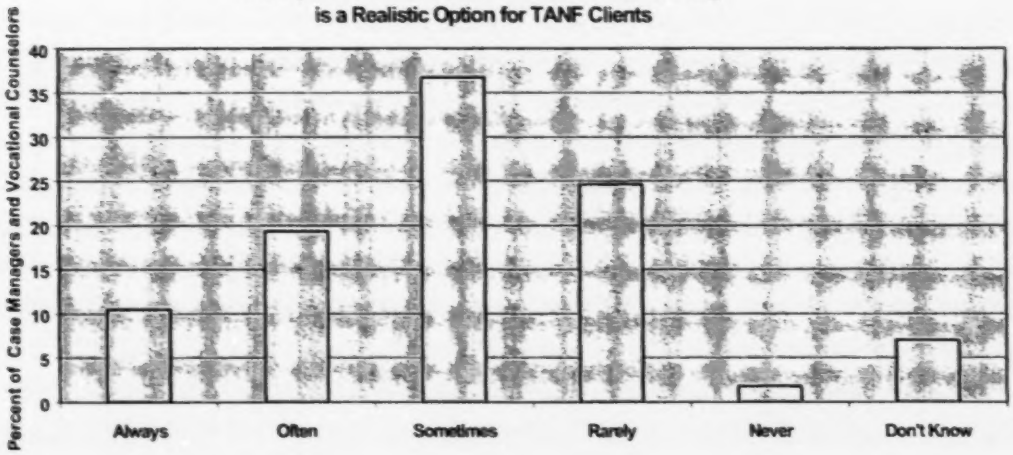
Chart 13.
Perception of How Often Nontraditional Job Training
is a Realistic Option for TANF Clients




The staff interviewed for this project offered several recommendations for improving job training opportunities for low-income individuals: allowing longer training programs that could include GED preparation, ESL instruction and computer training; providing more comprehensive support services, such as child care, transportation and clothing vouchers; and improving assessment and planning programs. However, if more low-income women are to move into nontraditional jobs, policies that explicitly address the barriers women face in entering and successfully completing nontraditional job training programs may also be necessary. These policies could include training of case managers and vocational counselors in the benefits that nontraditional employment offers for women, development of new programs to recruit TANF clients into these programs, and post-employment contact with employers to ensure that women's experiences in nontraditional jobs are positive.

## IV. Conclusion

Over the past several generations, women have developed new patterns of labor market involvement. Women now make up almost half the workforce, and women provide nearly two-fifths of families' total income. Women have made significant changes in their economic roles in response to contemporary economic and social conditions.

The labor market and government policies have failed to evolve along with this revolution in women's lives. Policymakers have yet to acknowledge that this influx of women into the workforce has created new and legitimate needs for programs and policies that strengthen caregivers' economic security, nor have they accepted responsibility for ensuring that women's employment opportunities are the same as men's. Until women's experiences are legitimated

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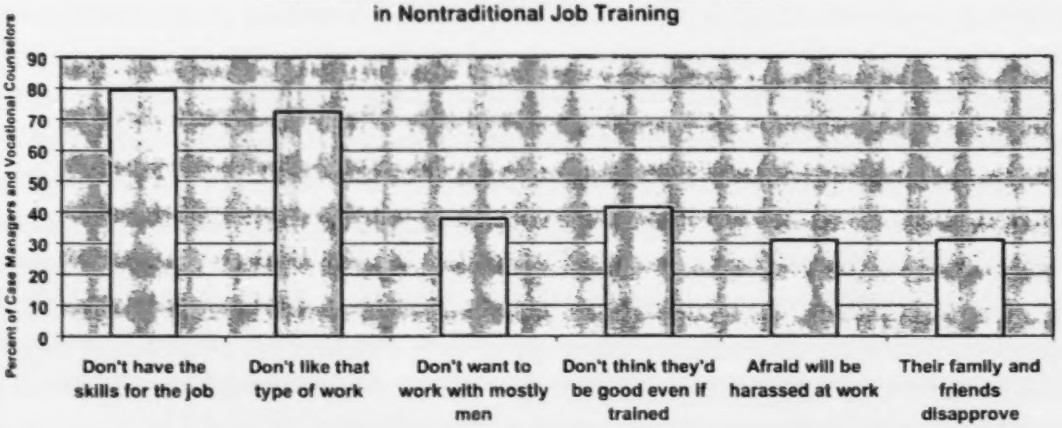
and defined as one norm for "ideal workers," programs such as UI and job training for low-income women will not offer the workforce security that women need and have earned.

**Chart 14.**
**Perceived Reasons That Women are Not Interested in Nontraditional Job Training**

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